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RECENT THEOLOGICAL LITERATURE

RELIGION AND MYTHOLOGY IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

For a bird's-eye view of the development of the religion of the Hebrews as reconstructed by the modern historical school Marti's sketch¹ is unsurpassed. The salient features of the development are clearly conceived and rightly related to the movement as a whole. Lucidity of utterance matches clearness of thought, and the result is delightful reading. Intended as an introduction and background to the recently completed *Kurzer Hand-Commentar zum Alten Testament*, it constitutes an admirable résumé of the chief results of historical criticism as it affects Old Testament theology.

In Marti's hands the history of the religion of Israel resolves itself into four periods, which he designates (1) the religion of the nomads, (2) the religion of the farmers, (3) the religion of the prophets, and (4) the religion of the law; and this, with an introduction, a summary, and an index, constitutes his table of contents. Such a suggestive characterization stimulates to further examination. It may be somewhat ungraciously urged that this analysis of Israel's religious progress is based, at least in part, upon external and adventitious phenomena, rather than upon any real and sharply differentiated phases of the religion itself. Such criticism, however, is captious, and we should rather be thankful that the significance of the conquest and settlement in Canaan for Israel's religious experience and growth has been so rightly emphasized.

With reference to the much-discussed question of the attitude of the prophets toward the ritual, Marti takes the extreme view, declaring that the religion of Moses and his immediate successors was essentially non-ritualistic, and that the prophets adhering to the early customs opposed the ritual *per se* as wholly displeasing to Yahweh. They would have it done away with entirely as an encroachment of Baalism upon Yahwism. That the ritual was greatly enriched when Israel entered Canaan there can be little doubt, but a non-ritualistic religion among the nomads is inconceivable in view of the character of all primitive Semitic religions. Nor can the prophets be credited with so radical a departure from the established usages of their day, for the existence of religion itself would have been imperiled by the destruction of the ritual. Religion is essen-

¹ *Die Religion des Alten Testaments unter den Religionen des vorderen Orients*. Von K. Marti. Tübingen: Mohr, 1906. vii+88 pages. M. 2.

tially ritual in its beginnings, and emancipation from ritual is a process requiring time for its successful accomplishment. The opposition of the prophets was directed against the deeply rooted conception that ritual was all that Yahweh demanded; their insistence was upon the worthlessness of ritual apart from a proper state of heart and life; the task they set before Israel was that of translating external symbol and ordinance into inner experience.

Marti's view that the prophets were the greatest of Israel's religious teachers, and that with them the culmination of the religion of Israel is attained, is open to question. Undoubtedly the ethicizing of Israel's religion is to be attributed to the prophets, and this was the most important single step taken in the religious progress of Israel. It is also true that the adoption of the law as the standard of life was an entering wedge that drove Israel and Yahweh ever farther and farther apart, breaking the sense of intimate fellowship and touch with God that characterized the prophets. But it must be remembered that the lawgivers began where the prophets left off, and that the ethical standards of the Jewish community, as reflected in post-exilic literature, are fully as high as those of the prophets themselves. Furthermore, the very fact of the removal of God from immediate contact with man is itself evidence of the highly exalted conception of the divine holiness and majesty as over against human weakness and sin. That a feeling of the divine sympathy and fellowship was by no means lost in the post-exilic community is clearly demonstrated by many psalms. Post-exilic religion was anything but an arid waste of formalism. It surpassed in complexity of interests, in depth of personal religious experience, and in magnificent affirmation of faith in the face of conditions making overwhelmingly for doubt and despair, any preceding stage of Israel's development. "New occasions teach new duties;" so the exilic and post-exilic lawmakers addressed themselves boldly and successfully to the great constructive task of making over their religion from a national inheritance into a vital, experiential possession of the individual and the church. The prophets dreamed their dreams and formulated their ideals in the monastic seclusion of Judah's hills; the priests and the sages of the later age wrought out their conclusions face to face with the great world, in the midst of the swirl of commerce, the clash of empires, and the maelstrom of conflicting philosophies and cults. It was pre-eminently a period of storm and stress, but over and above it all the faith of Israel soared triumphant. Who shall say whether prophet or priest is the greater? Each did his work and did it to the best of his ability, serving his day and generation in the fear of God.

In partial opposition to the general conception of Israel's religious development represented by Marti and the great majority of present-day scholars is Baentsch's monograph on monotheism.² According to the prevalent critical view, Israel achieved her monotheism only after a long struggle in which she successfully passed through the stages of animism, of polytheism and monolatry, arriving at her monotheistic goal finally in the days of Jeremiah and the exile. This advance in religious ideas went hand in hand with a similar rise in the plane of civilization. The Israel that gathered around Moses at Sinai was a horde of nomadic clans, lacking close inner connection, low in the scale of morals, with no literary attainments, ignorant of the arts and crafts, and thoroughly primitive in their social and civil relations. The entrance into Canaan meant for them a tremendous leap forward in their progress toward a high degree of civilization, and opened up to them the way toward world-wide conceptions both of things temporal and of things spiritual. This view has not been allowed to take possession of the field unchallenged. But the attempts to dislodge it have been based more or less upon theological presuppositions and prejudices, and have not been sufficiently concerned with actual facts. Hence they were doomed to failure in an age which will have nothing of theory, but thirsts for reality. Baentsch, however, is a historian and approaches his task solely from the historian's point of view. He belongs to the great body of historical critics and interpreters of the Old Testament, and has done splendid service in their ranks.³ Consequently when he differs from generally accepted conclusions, it must be for good reason. He does not hesitate to inform us that he himself "is certain of his case." Moreover, he claims to have found the answer to that question which has thus far baffled the historical student, viz., why was it that Yahweh, rather than Chemosh, Milcom, or some other national deity, became the sole God of heaven and earth?

In working out his conclusion, Baentsch first shows how monotheism arose in Egypt and Babylonia, and from these two centers made itself a home in the strip of cultivated land that formed the bridge between the two great empires over which marched the forces of commerce, culture, war, and religion (pp. 1-42). He clearly recognizes the limitations of this oriental monotheism, particularly the fact that it was after all a

² *Altorientalischer und israelitischer Monotheismus: Ein Wort zur Revision der entwicklungsgeschichtlichen Auffassung der israelitischen Religionsgeschichte.* Von B. Baentsch. Tübingen: Mohr, 1906. xii + 120 pages. M. 2.40.

³ Witness his commentaries on Exodus, Leviticus, and Numbers in the *Hand-Commentar zum Alten Testament* (1900-02) and his *Heiligkeitgesetz* (1893).

species of philosophic speculation rather than an inborn, religious conviction; and, furthermore, that in Babylonia, at least, it did not find clear expression until very late in history. In contrast to oriental monotheism, which is astral in origin, presupposes polytheistic manifestations of the deity with which the worshiper satisfies his need for religious communion, is a philosophy for the learned few who seek unity amid multiplicity, and ever worships a nature-god, the monotheism of Israel is characterized as ethical and spiritual, as an experience and possession open to all, as conquering and excluding polytheism, and as worshiping a personal, spiritual God (pp. 42-48). These two types of monotheism having been thus set in bold relief, the balance of the brochure is devoted to tracing the relation between the two. In this effort much stress is laid upon the fact of the residence of Moses, and later of Israel, at Sinai and Kadesh, where it is urged that they must have come in contact with a monotheistic worship of Sin, the moon-god. But no convincing evidence is forthcoming that monotheistic speculations had penetrated into the deserts of Arabia in that age. Nor is the supposition that Yahweh was originally a weather-god subordinate to the moon-god, and that he at last superseded the latter, at all capable of verification. Still further, on the hypothesis that all this were true, it would yet remain a mystery why Yahweh should have superseded Sin, when none of the gods of the various other peoples encircling Sinai succeeded in so doing. Nor is it clear why the absorption of one nature-god by another should have produced a god both personal and ethical.

Nevertheless, we may agree with Baentsch that the ascription to the pre-prophetic Yahweh of a greater range of activity and of a more clearly defined tendency in the direction of monotheism is demanded. It must remain largely a matter of speculation where this movement toward universalism had its origin, whether at Sinai or after Israel came into contact with the life and thought of Canaan. The traditions concerning the theophany at Sinai with Yahweh "coming down" upon the top of the mountain and the narratives of the creation and the flood are indisputable evidence that Israel began to discard the swaddling-clothes of an exclusively national religion and to struggle painfully toward world-wide conceptions of God and life at a relatively early period in the development of its religious consciousness. The presuppositions and express utterances of the early prophets likewise demand some such attainments as their background and source.

This study by Baentsch is thus no reversion to an antiquated type of

thought; it is a piece of thoroughly careful historical work; it applies rigidly and consistently the strictest historical methods; and it secures results that in the main stand the test of the historian's judgment. Every student of the religion of the Hebrews must reckon with this treatise. It does not discredit the prevalent conception of the gradual, historical growth of the Hebrew religion; it simply pushes farther back into history the beginnings of the process, and grants a longer period for the growth and ripening of Israel's choicest fruits.

Closely resembling Baentsch's study in some respects, and like it tending in part toward a rehabilitation of traditional views, is Gressmann's important book on Hebrew eschatology.⁴ The reconstruction of the history of Israel's eschatological ideas on the basis of the literary criticism of Wellhausen, Stade, *et al.*, has been admirably presented by R. H. Charles, in his *Critical History of the Doctrine of the Future Life* (1899), and by Volz, in his *Vorexilische Jahweprophetie und der Messias* (1897) and *Jüdische Eschatologie* (1903). Gressmann is a follower of Gunkel, and consequently, while accepting the results of literary criticism, makes much of comparative mythology. The wide difference in the results attained may be expressed by saying that for Wellhausen eschatology is the goal of prophecy, while for Gressmann eschatology is the starting-point, the background, the source of prophecy.

Gressmann organizes his discussion under two great divisions, viz., the eschatology of bliss and the eschatology of woe. The first has to do almost entirely with the great Day of Yahweh; the second includes the golden age, the Messiah, the Servant of Yahweh, and the Son of Man. All of these conceptions are declared to have had their origin in the realm of myth, and therefore in the prehistoric period. For example, the golden age which is to succeed the present dispensation is but the reflection of the age of Paradise with which the present age began; the Messiah is a mythical, half-divine being, and the *עֲלִיזָה* of Isa. 7:14 is his goddess-mother; the Servant of Yahweh is likewise a resuscitated mythical being, a parallel form to the Messiah, related to the Tammûz-Adonis cult; and the Son of man is the first man, a divine being, who opened the present age and is to return to inaugurate the golden age. Not only so, but all of these great eschatological conceptions are of non-Israelitish origin; they are importa-

⁴ *Der Ursprung der israelitisch-jüdischen Eschatologie*. ["Forschungen zur Religion und Literatur des Alten und Neuen Testaments," herausgegeben von W. Bousset und H. Gunkel, 6. Heft.] Von Hugo Gressmann, Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1905. viii + 378 pages. M. 10.

tions, most of them in a very early stage of Israel's existence, some of them at later periods. The great bulk of Israel's eschatology is of hoary antiquity; it was incorporated in Israel's consciousness in her infancy. But, we say, how then may we explain the fact that it is not until the post-exilic period that eschatology plays its important part in Israelitish literature? To meet this objection, Gressmann posits a new invasion of foreign eschatology in the later days, which not only brought in new materials, but also revived ideas that had long lain dormant. This invasion is a veritable *deus ex machina*.

We must also feel that Gressmann's view presupposes too great a barrenness of the Hebrew soul. Israel was certainly not totally lacking in the power of creative imagination either in literature or in religion. But Gressmann converts all poetic imagery into myth, and then assigns the myth to foreign sources. He is undoubtedly right in some instances; but his mythological broom sweeps too clean. For example, to call Yahweh a fire-god, and to say that Zephaniah's picture of the destruction of the world must be a survival of an old mythical view, because he speaks of the fire of Yahweh's wrath as causing the catastrophe, is not only to be guilty of an ungracious attempt to throw cold water upon Zephaniah's poetic fire, but also to ignore the fact that the anger of even human beings is often designated in the same way as when it is said of Cain, "it kindled (or was hot) to Cain exceedingly, etc." (Gen. 4:5). Again, it is surely not necessary to seek the basis of Isaiah's picture of the Assyrian invasion as an onrushing flood (Isa. 17:12; 28:17 f.) in a myth concerning an eschatological flood of real water. With the tradition of the deluge at hand the rich imaginative powers of Isaiah were certainly equal to the task of constructing such a figure as this, including its various details, without further extraneous aid. The mythological explanation of the great cedar of Ezek., chap. 31, is open to the same criticism. The reduction of Jeremiah's seventy years of exile to one year is an interesting process: seventy is a round number for seventy-two; the years are cycles of five days each, corresponding to the Babylonian five-day week; but five times seventy-two is three hundred and sixty—i. e., twelve lunar months of thirty days each, or one year. However, this result is hardly reconcilable with Jeremiah's letter to the exiles which urges them to build houses and raise families in view of a somewhat extended residence in Babylonia; and the sum and substance of this letter is quite generally acknowledged to be genuine.

Gressmann has, nevertheless, given us something more than a mass of ingenious speculations. The book evidences his wide reading, keen insight, and interpretative skill. His conclusions cannot be ignored. Some of them

are certainly right, as when, for example, in agreement with Baentsch and others, he insists upon granting a larger conception of God to the pre-prophetic period. The same thing may be said of his attribution to the pre-Amos idea of the Day of Yahweh more of the universal element than is conceded in my own history of this idea as given in a previous number of this *Journal*.⁵ But when Gressmann adds another stage—viz., the mythological—to the beginning of this history, the present writer cannot accept it as proven, though conceding the psychological possibility, or even probability, of such a basis for the later growth. One of the weakest sections of the discussion, it will probably be conceded, is the argument for the early origin of the various oracles concerning the messianic age (e. g., Mic. 4:1 ff.). The attempt to save these oracles by charging upon the prophets an almost total lack of the sense of logic is doomed to failure in the face of the splendid logic of many of the addresses of Amos, Isaiah, and Micah. Nor does the hypothesis of two great mythological world-conceptions, one looking toward total destruction of the world and the other toward the incoming of a glorious golden age, with the bridge between the two furnished by the doctrine of the remnant, add any strength to the argument for the retention of early promises of deliverance and glory.

The book is provocative of thought, and challenges discussion. It is one of the strongest products of the mythological school. The emergence and prominence of this school is the most marked feature in the recent history of Old Testament interpretation. At the beginning of the twentieth century the mythologs occupy a position analogous to that of the literary critics at the opening of the last century. Will the new school abide and play as prominent a part as has the old? Time will tell. Such names as Gunkel, Winckler, Cheyne, Jeremias, Jensen, and Zimmern promise great things. But whatever the outcome for historical criticism—and the school as a whole is far from moribund or being even in the least degree discouraged—it has already by its insistence upon the application of scientific method made its greatest contribution to the science of biblical interpretation. This is a permanent acquisition, and it renders return to the old dogmatic point of view impossible. The mythological school itself will be judged by the principles and methods of the historical school, and will stand or fall according as it does or does not rigidly adhere to these standards.

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⁵ J. M. P. Smith, "The Day of Yahweh," Vol. V (1901), pp. 505-33.